

News, Apps, Deals, and Gear from New England and Beyond

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FREEDOM 7 AT JFK LIBRARY

In 1961, astronaut Alan Shepard piloted Freedom 7 to become the first American in space. The space capsule can now be seen at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Clamped atop a rocket nearly seven stories high, Freedom 7 was blasted into a 302-mile suborbital flight from Cape Canaveral, Fla., before splashing down in the Atlantic, a journey lasting 15 minutes and 28 seconds. On loan from the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum through 2015, the installation marks the 50th anniversary of President Kennedy's speech at Rice University, where he championed the nation's manned space efforts. Adults \$12, age 62 and up and students (with valid ID) \$10, 13-17 \$9, children 12 and under free. *Columbia Point, 617-514-1600, www.jfklibrary.org*

TAKE OFF AT BIKE PARK IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Hit the trails and pop a wheelie at the Highland Mountain Bike Park in Northfield, N.H., where a ski lift takes you and your bike from the base lodge to the mountaintop. Trails for intermediate, advanced, and expert riders keep adventure levels high for a variety of skill levels. Ride over natural and manmade paths dotted with ramps and drops sure to send you skyward. A new 9,100-square-foot indoor training center includes a massive foam pit with a trick lip and drop, resi ramp and resi drop, and other features where you can practice before heading out to tackle the mountain (\$14). Open Fridays and Saturdays through Nov. 17, day pass \$38, ages 10 and under \$15. *75 Ski Hill Drive, 603-286-7677, www.highlandmountain.com*

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CONRAD NEW YORK OPEN

The recently opened Conrad New York, a 463-room all-suite luxury hotel, is the first New York address from Conrad Hotels & Resorts, the global brand of Hilton Worldwide. Located in the vibrant Battery Park City neighborhood, it is a comfortable and convenient place to perch while exploring the sights around Manhattan, including the nearby 9/11 Memorial. The modern interior features a soaring 15-story atrium with an eye-catching blue and purple Sol LeWitt painting rising 13 floors above the registration desk. The seasonal rooftop bar, Loopy Doopy, is a lively spot for drinks (boozy popsicles in prosecco, anyone?) with 180-degree views of the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, and the Hudson River. Deluxe rooms from \$299 (weekends) and \$449 (weekdays). *102 North End Ave., 212-945-0100, www.conradnewyork.com*

NEW YORK ART TO BE SEEN

The fall art scene kicks off with a trilogy of shows at the Javits Center, Oct. 19, 20, and 21, when 250 artists and artisans exhibit their work at the 2012 Contemporary Art Fair NYC, American Craft Show NYC, and Art Off the Main. Comfortable shoes are recommended for touring 70,000 square feet showcasing established and emerging painters, photographers, sculptors, and artists working in mixed media, fashion, jewelry, furniture, ceramics, glass, wood, metal, and textiles. New this year: Art Off the Main features artists of Caribbean, African, and Latin American ancestry. One ticket allows entry to all three juried events. Adults \$14, seniors \$13, students \$8, children under age 10 free. *11th Avenue and 39th Street, Javits Center Hall 1A, 845-355-2400, www.americanartmarketingnyc.com/home_visitors.php*

EVERYWHERE

AN ECO-AMP FOR YOUR IPHONE

Even the smallest audio speakers add weight to a travel bag. Now you can amplify your favorite tunes with the light-as-a-feather eco-amp 2.0. A passive amplifier that slides onto the end of your iPhone 4 or 4S, it increases sound volume and clarity without any external power. Made in the USA and constructed out of a renewable 100 percent post-consumer fiber paper, the eco-friendly amp uses locking tabs for assembly instead of adhesives. Choose from 24 patterns printed with soy-based ink. Each flat package contains two eco-amps that can be assembled and disassembled for reuse and travel. \$10. *www.eco-made.com*

LET'S GO LAUNCHES SITE, APPS

Run by Harvard University students since 1960, Let's Go Publications is revitalizing its digital presence by launching a website and line of mobile apps designed for travelers on a student budget. The new website includes student reviews of listings and destinations, student-written blogs from the road, student-produced videos, and photos. Let's Go Explore apps for iPhone and Android cover 25 cities, with Nook apps coming soon. Each free app features five city walking tours handpicked by student travelers. These apps are teasers for the upcoming Let's Go app, a full digital travel guide with thousands of listings and content from all of the Let's Go guidebooks. *www.lets-go.com, www.lets-go.com/apps*

LGBT ONLINE RESERVATION PORTAL

World Rainbow Hotels, a gay and lesbian travel organization, has launched a new website where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender consumers can search and book reservations at genuinely gay-welcoming hotels worldwide. Using rigorous screening criteria, the online reservation portal selected more than 850 three- to five-star properties in 129 global destinations. Accommodations range from luxury to budget-chic hotels. *www.worldrainbowhotels.com*

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CIARAN TULLY



Gilded age Grand Central

About to turn 100, it remains a gem of Midtown

By James F. Lee
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

NEW YORK — Grand Central Terminal is featured in lots of movies, from Hitchcock's "North By Northwest" to the animated "Madagascar," and with good reason: It is a magnificent Beaux Arts monument, one of the finest examples of civic architecture in the country. In February it will celebrate its 100th birthday.

My wife and I recently took the official audio tour of Grand Central Terminal. We paid \$7 each at the ticket window on the main concourse and were provided with headphones, audio player, and a map, which took us on a 21-stop tour inside, below, and outside the station. We went at our own pace, taking about 90 minutes to complete the tour.

Grand Central was built in 1913 by the Vanderbilt family, owners of the New York Central Railroad, who wanted a terminal that would reflect their wealth and power. Their railroad is no more, but their monument remains, now operated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). Commuters arrive and depart on the Metro-North Railroad connecting Grand Central to the counties just north of the city and in Connecticut.

We started at the heart of the terminal, the four-sided brass clock on top of the information booth right in the middle of the grand concourse, as hundreds of tourists, commuters, and New Yorkers shouldered past us. According to our audio guide, 700,000 people pass through this building every day. Some walked with determination, head down, while others took photos and gawked at the architecture as the loudspeaker announced, "Now departing from track 42."

On the lovely cerulean blue ceiling 125 feet above our heads was a dazzling depiction of the nighttime sky complete with constellations outlined in gold leaf. We were able to pick out



PHOTOS BY JAMES F. LEE FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The east balcony from the main concourse at Grand Central Terminal, one of the world's largest train stations.



Chicagoans Marc Parker, center, and Shannon Fasser, right, at the Oyster Bar, which first opened in 1913.

Aries, Pisces, and Taurus.

At one time that night sky was completely black, covered by layers of grime, accumulated from years of cigarette and cigar smoke. Workers cleaned it by hand during the building's \$250 million restoration in the 1990s, leaving behind a little dark patch high in the ceiling near the western windows as a reminder of how dirty that ceiling once was.

Three gigantic 60-foot arched windows in cast iron frames dominate the eastern and western walls of the terminal. They are actually double windows, wide enough apart to allow catwalks in between, giving pedestrians access to the skyscrapers surrounding the terminal. During WWII they were blacked out and were not completely cleaned until 1998.

Commuter David McNamara, who takes the train on the Harlem Line from Chappaqua every morning, remembered back in the 1980s when those windows were still dark. "Now the windows let in a lot of light," he said. "It's a nice feeling to see the stars in the ceiling."

The grand west stairway made of Tennessee marble took us from the main concourse to the second level, giving a sweeping view of the interior. A parallel east stairway was added in 1997, made from marble from the same quarry as the original.

During restoration, the huge chandeliers throughout the terminal were given a thorough cleaning. The restorers were astonished to find that though they were thought to be bronze

because of their dull color, they were actually shiny nickel and gold.

Beneath the main concourse in the bustling Grand Central Market, the smell of fresh fish competed with the fragrance of fresh-cut flowers. Customers come here to buy fresh vegetables, chocolates, and meats as well. The terminal houses three fine dining restaurants, over a dozen places to grab a quick bite, and about 30 shops offering everything from spices to leather goods.

We ate lunch that day at the venerable Oyster Bar and Restaurant, which has been there since the terminal was built. I had the cherrystone clam stew, huge clams in a milky broth, while my wife had Manhattan clam chowder. We washed it all down with local ales.

The Oyster Bar boasts one of New York's most exhaustive selections of shellfish. At the raw bar, Chicagoans Marc Parker and Shannon Fasser were sampling from dozens of clams, mussels, and oysters listed on the big board behind the bar. "This place was highly recommended by my boss," said Parker, who didn't seem disappointed.

That Grand Central will still be around to celebrate its 100th birthday is something of a miracle. New Yorkers, such as Jacqueline Onassis, were shocked by the demolition of nearby Penn Station in 1964 and didn't want Grand Central to go the same way. They fought all the way up to the US Supreme Court in support of the New York Landmark Law that gave Grand Central protective status.

We saw the fruits of their labors during our tour, but longtime commuters like McNamara have seen it all.

"You appreciate how beautiful it is," he said, "because I remember what it once was."

Grand Central Terminal
87 East 42d St., 212-340-2583,
www.grandcentralterminal.com. Check website for centennial celebration schedule and for dining and retail hours.

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JANET MENDELSON FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

An overlook for visitors at prehistoric Ausable Chasm, N.Y.

Adirondack chasm with view to eons ago

AUSABLE CHASM, N.Y. — When I was growing up, I saw bumper stickers promoting Ausable Chasm everywhere. But what was it? A recent ferry trip from Burlington, Vt., solved that childhood mystery. The chasm, five minutes by car from the Port Kent ferry dock, is the oldest natural attraction in the Adirondacks. Since 1870, more than 10 million visitors have hiked the trails to see cascading waterfalls and the two-mile gorge caused by geological faults and the Ausable River cutting through sandstone over the past 500 million years.

The whole place feels like you have stepped back in time. From scenic trails to souvenir shop and cafeteria, it's an unpretentious tourist destination. We chose a self-guided walk through woodland to natural stone, cliff-edge paths with views of rock formations such as Elephant's Head and the Devil's Oven Cave. Marked

trails offer varied levels of difficulty, mostly easy; some intimidating with steep stairs to narrow ledges; all well-fenced for safety. When a malfunction for raft float trips meant an hour's wait, we kept walking.

For tubing trips, bring water shoes or sneakers (no flip-flops). Mountain biking, summer evening lantern tours, cross-country skiing, and a new three-hour rappelling and cable traversing tour are other options. We loved the one-hour ferry crossing with its distant views of shadowy blue mountains. And those bumper stickers? "For years, staff plastered them on every car in the parking lot till people complained," a staffer said. They're not sold anymore.

Ausable Chasm 2144 Route 9, 518-834-7454, www.ausablechasm.com, \$16 ages 13 and up, \$9 children 5-12, free under 5. Additional fees for rafting-tubing, rappelling.

JANET MENDELSON